1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

APPRENTICE LAMAS

The four-year old son of Chudo.

Chimpet in lama's dress, with his hands joined in prayer; taken inside the monastery porch.

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2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

CHAPTER 8

Houses and House-building

342 THE ordinary Lepcha house is extremely simple and generally contains but two rooms, one of which is used as a kitchen. In appearance it does not differ, except in size, from the monastery, which I take to be the prototype of Sikkim domestic architecture.

174 346 It seems likely that in Tibet the original monasteries also served as forts, as is often still the case. In view of the unsettled state of that country there was need for the people to keep close together; so that instead of living in scattered houses they all lived together inside the forts. As conditions became more peaceful the need to live in close proximity to others became gradually less urgent, but when the people came to build their own houses it was natural that they should take the local fort or monastery as their model, since they had none other. I am not suggesting that this also happened in Sikkim; and the transition in Tibet had probably taken place long before the Lepchas took to living in permanent houses. Sikkim, however, has always been in close cultural contact with Tibet; and in no way is the influence of the latter country more marked than in the local style of architecture. The extremely wet climate of Sikkim has of course made certain modifications necessary. Of these the most striking is the wide overhanging roof, which often projects as much as fifteen feet in front of the walls. It is one of the most pleasing features of all Sikkim houses, and has the additional advantage of keeping the walls completely dry throughout the rainy season.

In Tibet, monasteries, and in fact most houses, are usually built with very thick walls: they are sometimes as much as ten feet thick at the base. It is improbable that such thickness

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

was ever necessary for purposes of defence; but in a country as dry and cold as Tibet, where internal heating is still unknown, they serve the purpose of keeping the occupants of houses warm. This feature, although quite unnecessary in the warmer climate of Sikkim, has been retained in most of the public buildings, but in private houses has given way to walls of bamboo lath and mud plaster, which give all the protection required.

The ordinary Lepcha cottage is generally raised about six feet above ground, and is supported by wooden pillars resting on stones. It is entered by means of a ladder, which usually takes the form of a roughly notched bamboo, the space beneath the house being occupied by the cattle.

The building of houses, like every other Lepcha activity, is hedged around with rules and restrictions. Not all of these are always regarded; but to pretend a complete indifference would be to lay oneself open to the machinations of the ubiquitous evil spirits.

When a man wishes to build a new house he first takes a little earth from the proposed site and gives it to a Lama, who will then divine whether the place is suitable or not. This he does, not by means of meditation, or any other form of concentration, but by referring to a book called *Sachet Zai Patar*. There was only one copy in Lingtem and its owner, when reading it out to us, was honest enough to own that although he had studied the book for years he still found some of the instructions quite incomprehensible. Here is the gist of them:

Jampay Yung, Kongshi Gyabo, Hishay Tugyel, and Shinji Tulgay Gyabo once gathered together in Gyakar, which, so the Hlaribu said, is probably Budh Gaya but may be Benares! But in any case, in Gyakar there are seven burning ghats. These four gods consulted together and they came to the conclusion that since men were building houses all over the place, and without any regard to the suitability of the sites, it was incumbent upon them to formulate some instructions.

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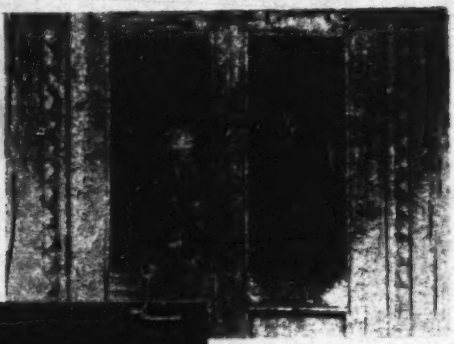
Happy family.



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Lepcha girl.

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Tafoor's two daughters.

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Baby, having overeaten at luncheon.

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